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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0011
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2512
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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0354
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0995

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000033

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/PB
STATE FOR SCA/PPD, PA/RRU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SHEIKH HASINA FORMS NEW GOVERNMENT

Reftel: Dhaka 28

11. Summary: All English and vernacular newspapers extensively covered the swearing-in ceremony of Awami League-led Grand Alliance leader Sheikh Hasina and her 32-member cabinet. (See reftel for a further readout on the new government.) Editorials and commentary in newspapers across the political spectrum welcomed the new government. Most outlets stressed the enormity of the challenges facing the relatively inexperienced new government, in particular the Foreign Minister, Dr. Dipu Moni, and the Home Minister, Shahara Khatun. Outlets also emphasized Bangladeshis' high expectations of the new government and the importance of good governance and accountability. History suggests the new government can look forward to a brief media honeymoon. End summary.

12. A selection of media reaction follows:

1A. "A NEW GOVERNMENT TAKES THE OATH OF OFFICE," an editorial in the January 7 generally anti-West Bangla daily INQILAB:

"Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed's Caretaker Government quickly handed over power to Sheikh Hasina's elected government. People from all political quarters appreciated this smooth handover.... We welcome the new Prime Minister and her government. Hasina is aware of the huge responsibility that her government has undertaken."

1B. "WELCOME GRAND-ALLIANCE," an editorial in the January 7 strongly pro-BNP Bangla daily AMAR DESH:

"The two-year term of the unelected caretaker government ended yesterday with the swearing in of the new cabinet led by Sheikh Hasina. With this, the door of democracy has opened. Though some have raised questions about the elections, we congratulate and welcome this government. The entire nation hopes that the parliament will be more active and will be the center of all national activities.... The Awami League is an old party, last in power seven years ago. The party now has an opportunity to do something good for the country by learning from its past successes and failures. The people's expectation, and ours as well, is that the government will govern the country accordingly."

1C. "WELCOME TRANSITION TO ELECTED GOVERNMENT: THE CHALLENGES BEFORE IT ARE MANY AND ENORMOUS," an editorial in the January 7 generally neutral English newspaper THE DAILY STAR:

"The cabinet is largely composed of new faces. For the most part, it is an inexperienced team. It will therefore be a big challenge for the government to deliver the goods in full measure to the nation. The government itself is conscious of those challenges. These challenges can broadly be categorized into three areas --

national, regional and international. The priorities at the national level are prices of essentials, employment generation and improvement of the energy situation. The new government will be expected to pursue a clear, purposeful foreign policy. Of particular importance will be a firm handling of such issues as our maritime boundaries and checking and eliminating cross border insurgency. On such issues as the Middle East, a strong response on Bangladesh's part to all aggressive acts, such as those being committed by Israel in Gaza, will signify an assertive foreign policy.... Let the new Hasina government speak for all citizens of this land."

1D. "NEW CABINET SWORN IN: WE WISH THEM SUCCESS," an editorial in the January 7 Jamaat Islami-owned Bangla daily NAYA DIGANTA:

"In a parliamentary democracy, collective accountability of the government along with the personal accountability of the ministers is very important. People have high expectations for this government because it has made many commitments. The new cabinet must ensure a pro-people administration. It must keep in mind that corruption, nepotism and politicization are created and sustained by the ministers. They can also misrule. Sycophants spread corruption through the ministers. After becoming a minister, a person's loyalty belongs to the people, not to the party. We wish them success."

1E. "WELCOME NEW GOVERNMENT," an editorial in the January 7 pro-Awami League Bangla daily JUGANTOR:

"We congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet members. We wish the new government success.... The people's

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expectations are very high, but the government has to prioritize its tasks. Reducing the prices for essentials, curbing corruption, eliminating crime, ensuring security and establishing good governance should now be the government's first priorities.... The government should make the parliament effective. No matter the size of the opposition, its members should be able to participate in debates in parliament.... Statutory bodies such as the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission should be allowed to work independently to institutionalize democracy."

MORIARTY